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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003601

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: CAUCA: FARC DIMINISHED, BUT RETAIN INFLUENCE IN
SOME INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

REF: BOGOTA 3553

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Colombian military is steadily pushing the FARC into Cauca department's northeast corner, reducing the group's influence. Still, the FARC retains a significant base within the Paez indigenous communities in northern Cauca, and GOC officials fear the communities are vulnerable to penetration by radical indigenous groups from Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela. Local Army commander General Alfonso Barrero claims the FARC is providing 1000 rifles to the Paez in an effort to revive the defunct Quintin Lame indigenous terrorist group. Both the FARC and ELN cooperate with the powerful narco-trafficking group "los Rastrojos" which dominates key coastal trafficking routes. The Catholic Archbishop of Popayan fears extremist indigenous advocacy groups are fueling tensions between Cauca's three main ethnic groups--the indigenous, Afro-Colombians, and the mixed race "mestizos." End Summary

¶2. (C) Cauca is home to over 250,000 indigenous (21% of population), including the 150,000-strong Paez (or Nasa) in northern Cauca. The large number of Paez--in contrast with most of Colombia's almost 90 official known indigenous communities which have fewer than 2000 members--give the group substantial political influence in the department.

SECURITY SITUATION IN CAUCA

¶3. (C) Brigadier General Leonardo Barrero Cordillo of the 29th Colombian Army Brigade tells us the military has successfully pushed the 8th front of the FARC into the northeastern corner of Cauca, where they receive support from FARC strongholds in Huila and Tolima. Totoro indigenous farmer Libardo Becoche says poppy production in the highlands is common in northern Cauca, as is coca and marijuana cultivation at lower altitudes. He notes that coca processing plants exist in Toribi and Morales, and that it is common to see members of the "Rastrojos" narco-trafficking group provide security while the FARC process the coca. Barrero says violence is highest in drug production regions and along smuggling routes.

¶4. (C) Barrero says the "Rastrojos" continue to dominate the Pacific region--their primary drug shipment route tracks the Patia river which cuts through the Western mountain range. Cauca Colombian National Police Commander (CNP) Colonel Luis

Joaquin Camacho confirms a strong narco-trafficker presence in the Pacific coast, noting alliances between the ELN and the "Rastrojos." He says the "Rastrojos" use displacement as a strategy to destabilize a zone to make narco-operations easier--2000 members of the community of Lopez de Micay in the Pacific were displaced the first week of September 2008.

RESURGENCE OF INDIGENOUS GUERRILLA GROUP?

15. (C) General Barrero tells us the indigenous groups near Caloto--where the majority of the indigenous protests take place--have been infiltrated by the FARC (see reftel). He has intelligence that the FARC recently sent 1000 rifles to help start a new armed indigenous group in Northern Cauca--the "Grandchildren" of the Quintin Lame. Quintin Lame is an indigenous terrorist group that demobilized in 1991. Barrero says his primary concern in the north is the FARC's "use" of the Paez reserves (resguardos) to hide drug operations and to skim off funds from international assistance projects meant for the indigenous. Popayan Mayor Ramiro Antonio Navia adds that corruption is common among local indigenous leaders--especially in the north.

BOLIVARIAN UNDERTONES?

16. (C) Cauca Ranchers Association head Jorge Castro tells us Governor Guillermo Alberto Gonzalez' sister, Maria Alejandra Gonzalez Mosquera, had a long-time intimate relationship with FARC Commander Arteta--she now is in charge of indigenous issues for the department. Navia says Maria Alejandra

received ideological training in Venezuela, and General Barrero says the Army has intelligence that Gonzalez organized a regional indigenous conference with participants from Bolivia, Venezuela and Peru. He tells us military informants who attended the conference confirmed the conference discussions did not address indigenous rights, but instead served to recruit for the FARC's Bolivarian Movement.

Colombian Military Forces Commander Freddy Padilla de Leon fears that northern Cauca is one of the few areas in Colombia that could be susceptible to penetration by radical indigenous movements from Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela.

ROLE OF INDIGENOUS ADVOCACY GROUPS

17. (C) Archbishop Ivan Arzo fears that some indigenous organizations, such as the Regional Council for the Indigenous of Cauca (CRIC), are fomenting ethnic hatred in Cauca. (Note: Cauca's population is 21% indigenous, 21% Afro-Colombian, and 55% mestizo.) Afro-Colombian community leader Lucy Diaz tells us her organization started a tri-ethnic working group to address ethnic tensions. She says ethnic relations in her community are "excellent," adding that the indigenous had offered to share the land gained from the Nilo agreement (see reftel) with some Afro-Colombian communities. CRIC Quilcue dismisses Diaz' comments as "absurd," saying the CRIC has no plans to share ancestral lands with any other ethnic group. Arzo notes that the indigenous advocacy groups--primarily led by foreigners--are teaching local indigenous "ancestral" rituals which come from Peru, not Colombia.

RELATIONSHIP WITH SECURITY FORCES

18. (C) Third Army Brigade Commander General Jaime Esguerra tells us he has a dialogue with the CRIC, which he characterizes as "neutral" in the fight against the FARC, and also meets regularly with other indigenous leaders. Barrero claims to have "excellent" relations with more peaceful indigenous in the Western and South Central mountain ranges. Indigenous farmer Becoche confirms the military outreach efforts, but says non-violent indigenous communities resent the international funding that "rewards" areas of conflict and illicit coca cultivation. Barrero tells us half of the

indigenous in the FARC have been forcefully recruited; the other half join for economic reasons. An indigenous councilman complains that in the north, the FARC require families to "give" one or two of their children to the group.

19. (C) Quilcue says the military and police systematically commit human rights violations against the indigenous in Cauca. Afro-Colombian leader Lucy Diaz adds that the military, but especially the police, "cannot not be trusted." She explains that the police stay in one location for longer periods, making them more susceptible to corruption. Archbishop Arzo comments that some community-military relations are strained, but concludes that the military successes against the FARC have improved the situation.

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